

Persistence toward a bachelor's degree

Personal, financial, and academic circumstances often interfere with students' completion of bachelor's degree programs. Understanding the relationship between these circumstances and students' paths through postsecondary education is essential to help them succeed.

- Among beginning students seeking bachelor's degrees in 1989–90, three-quarters of those who began in 4-year institutions and more than half of those who began in 2-year institutions reported completing some degree or were still working toward a bachelor's degree 5 years later. Students who began in 4-year institutions were much more likely to report completing a bachelor's degree in 5 years than those who began in 2-year institutions (57 versus 8 percent).
- Students who entered postsecondary education at age 18 or younger were more than twice as likely (51 versus 19 percent) as those who entered between ages 20 and 29 to report completing a bachelor's degree within 5 years, and five times more likely than students who entered at age 30 or later.
- Half of bachelor's degree seekers (52 percent) who first enrolled on a full-time basis reported having completed that degree within 5 years, compared to 15 percent or less of those who first enrolled less than full time.
- As socioeconomic status (SES) and parents' educational attainment levels increased, so did students' likelihood of completing a bachelor's degree, or any degree, within 5 years. Bachelor's degree seekers with lower SES or whose parents had less education were more likely to report completing no degree (see supplemental table 12-1).

Percentage distribution of 1989–90 beginning postsecondary students seeking bachelor's degrees, by persistence toward and completion of bachelor's and other degrees as of spring 1994 and selected characteristics

Selected characteristics	Completed a degree				Still enrolled for bachelor's ²	No degree, no longer enrolled toward a bachelor's						
	Highest degree completed ¹			Total any degree		Total no degree	Number of months enrolled ³					
	Bachelor's	Associate	Certificate				Less than 9	9–18	19–27	28–36	37–45	More than 45
Total	45.8	5.1	3.3	54.3	17.5	28.3	2.8	8.1	5.7	5.6	3.8	2.3
Level of first institution												
4-year	57.1	2.5	2.1	61.7	15.3	23.1	1.9	5.5	5.3	4.9	3.3	2.1
2-year	7.9	13.9	7.2	29.0	25.3	45.8	5.4	16.8	7.0	8.2	5.3	3.0
Age as of 12/31/89												
18 years or younger	51.4	4.9	2.9	59.2	16.4	24.5	1.5	5.2	5.9	5.7	3.5	2.7
19 years	38.3	4.2	3.4	45.8	21.1	33.0	4.0	13.4	4.4	6.0	3.4	1.6
20–29 years	19.0	9.4	7.9	36.3	19.6	44.1	8.2	17.9	6.5	2.8	7.7	1.0
30 years or older	9.8	6.0	3.3	19.1	17.3	63.5	19.4	28.9	4.8	9.9	0.5	0.0
Enrollment status, first term												
Full time	51.7	4.1	2.5	58.3	16.7	25.0	1.7	6.6	5.3	5.6	3.5	2.3
At least half, less than full time	14.5	11.5	6.1	32.1	24.5	43.4	5.9	18.9	5.6	2.5	7.8	2.5
Less than half time	10.5	4.9	11.4	26.8	26.8	46.4	17.3	8.0	9.1	8.0	0.3	3.7
Received aid in 1989–90												
No	36.9	7.0	4.5	48.4	21.0	30.7	3.0	8.7	6.2	6.3	3.9	2.7
Yes	55.1	3.2	2.2	60.4	13.8	25.8	2.7	7.5	5.2	4.9	3.7	1.9

¹ Includes only students who were no longer working toward a bachelor's degree, but who had completed another type of degree.

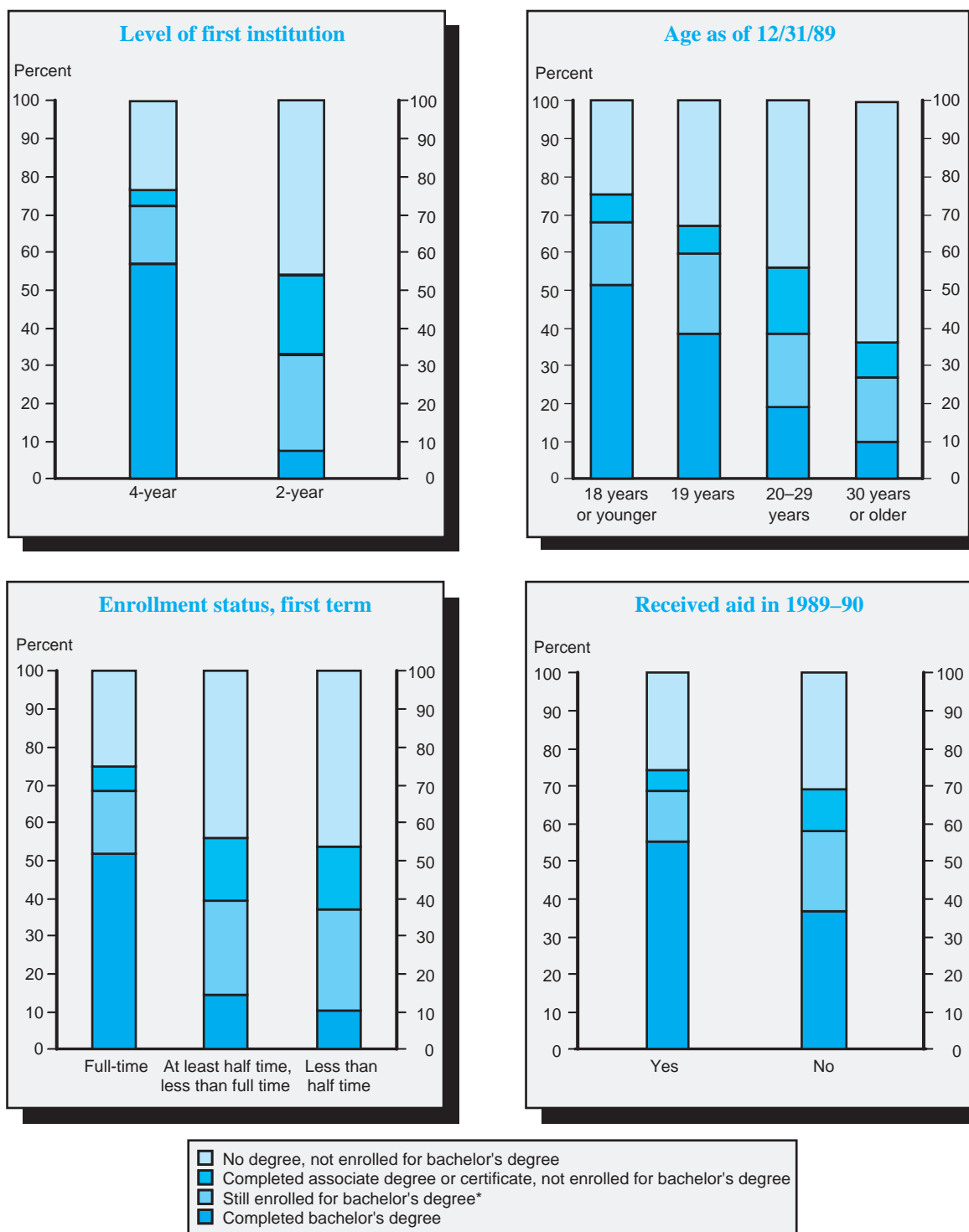
² Includes students who had completed another type of degree or award (associate degree, 11.8 percent; certificate, 2.7 percent), but who are still working toward a bachelor's degree.

³ Enrollment can be full time or part time. Includes students who are still enrolled but who are no longer working toward a bachelor's degree.

NOTE: Details may not add to totals due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1990 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:90/94).

Percentage distribution of 1989–90 beginning postsecondary students seeking bachelor's degrees, by persistence toward and completion of bachelor's and other degrees as of spring 1994



* Includes students who had completed another type of degree or award (associate degree, 11.8 percent; certificate, 2.7 percent), but who are still working toward a bachelor's degree.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1990 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:90/94).

Table 12-1 Percentage distribution of 1989–90 beginning postsecondary students seeking bachelor's degrees, by persistence toward and completion of bachelor's and other degrees as of spring 1994 and selected characteristics

Selected characteristics	Completed a degree				Still enrolled for bachelor's ²	No degree, no longer enrolled toward a bachelor's							
	Highest degree completed ¹			Total any degree		Total no degree	Number of months enrolled ³						
	Bachelor's	Associate	Certificate				Less than 9	9–18	19–27	28–36	37–45	More than 45	
Total	45.8	5.1	3.3	54.3	17.5	28.3	2.8	8.1	5.7	5.6	3.8	2.3	
Sex													
Male	41.3	4.8	2.7	48.8	20.3	30.9	2.9	9.6	6.7	5.9	3.9	1.9	
Female	50.3	5.4	4.0	59.7	14.6	25.7	2.8	6.6	4.7	5.3	3.6	2.7	
Age as of 12/31/89													
18 years or younger	51.4	4.9	2.9	59.2	16.4	24.5	1.5	5.2	5.9	5.7	3.5	2.7	
19 years	38.3	4.2	3.4	45.8	21.1	33.0	4.0	13.4	4.4	6.0	3.4	1.6	
20–29 years	19.0	9.4	7.9	36.3	19.6	44.1	8.2	17.9	6.5	2.8	7.7	0.9	
30 years or older	9.8	6.0	3.3	19.1	17.3	63.5	19.4	28.9	4.8	9.9	0.5	0.0	
Race/ethnicity													
White	48.1	4.9	3.3	56.4	16.6	27.0	3.0	6.8	5.9	5.3	3.7	2.2	
Black	34.3	7.3	3.6	45.2	18.0	36.8	5.4	15.5	5.1	6.1	2.0	2.6	
Hispanic	32.4	3.5	5.4	41.3	22.1	36.6	0.5	14.0	6.4	4.6	7.8	3.3	
Asian/Pacific Islander	46.8	5.3	0.6	52.8	21.8	25.5	0.0	9.4	2.1	10.2	1.2	2.5	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Marital status in 1989–90													
Never married	48.1	5.3	3.4	56.8	17.4	25.8	1.7	6.9	5.7	5.1	3.8	2.4	
Married	20.1	2.4	4.2	26.7	17.8	55.5	13.7	27.6	5.9	7.9	0.4	0.0	
Divorced/widowed/separated	11.6	9.5	0.6	21.7	18.4	59.9	28.8	22.8	7.5	0.0	0.9	0.0	
Number of children in 1989–90													
None	47.2	5.2	3.2	55.6	17.3	27.1	2.4	7.2	5.7	5.6	3.8	2.4	
One	12.8	9.5	2.7	25.0	13.1	61.9	22.4	25.6	9.4	2.8	1.7	0.0	
Two	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Three or more	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Socioeconomic status													
Lowest quartile	22.1	5.7	3.8	31.7	16.5	51.8	8.2	25.0	7.6	5.7	3.4	1.9	
Middle two quartiles	38.9	4.8	3.5	47.1	19.4	33.5	3.0	9.5	7.3	7.3	3.4	2.9	
Highest quartile	52.9	5.3	3.2	61.5	16.3	22.3	2.1	5.2	4.4	4.5	4.0	2.0	
Family income ⁴													
Less than \$20,000	36.9	4.9	1.4	43.2	19.2	37.6	3.2	10.7	6.8	7.4	6.1	3.4	
20,000–39,999	43.2	5.3	4.1	52.6	18.2	29.2	2.9	8.9	5.5	6.3	3.0	2.5	
40,000–59,999	48.5	4.1	4.4	57.0	16.1	26.9	1.8	7.2	6.5	5.9	3.4	2.0	
60,000 or more	60.6	6.0	1.5	68.1	16.0	15.9	0.4	2.5	3.9	3.6	4.0	1.6	
Parents' educational attainment													
Less than high school graduate	33.6	3.6	6.1	43.4	7.8	48.8	10.9	11.1	6.4	11.2	5.7	3.6	
High school graduate	35.0	7.3	4.6	46.9	18.4	34.7	6.4	11.6	6.6	5.2	3.3	1.6	
Some postsecondary	45.1	4.8	3.0	52.9	17.5	29.6	1.2	9.7	7.7	4.5	3.5	2.9	
Bachelor's degree	48.8	5.4	3.6	57.7	19.2	23.1	0.8	4.8	4.6	5.6	4.3	3.0	
Advanced degree	61.2	2.9	0.7	64.8	16.4	18.9	1.0	3.0	3.8	5.9	3.7	1.5	
High school credential													
High school diploma	46.5	5.2	3.4	54.4	17.3	28.3	2.8	8.1	5.7	5.6	3.7	2.3	
Equivalency certificate	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
None	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	

Table 12-1 Percentage distribution of 1989–90 beginning postsecondary students seeking bachelor's degrees, by persistence toward and completion of bachelor's and other degrees as of spring 1994 and selected characteristics—Continued

Selected characteristics	Completed a degree				Still enrolled for bachelor's ²	No degree, no longer enrolled toward a bachelor's							
	Highest degree completed ¹			Total any degree		Total no degree	Number of months enrolled ³						
	Bachelor's	Associate	Certificate				Less than 9	9–18	19–27	28–36	37–45	More than 45	
Diploma/delayed entry status ⁵													
Diploma, did not delay	50.3	4.9	2.9	58.2	17.0	24.8	1.8	6.3	5.4	5.5	3.5	2.3	
Diploma, delayed entry	17.3	7.1	6.6	30.9	21.5	47.6	8.9	18.9	7.1	4.3	6.1	2.2	
No diploma	15.0	2.4	3.7	21.0	14.1	64.8	13.4	22.7	8.1	18.3	0.8	1.5	
Level of first institution													
4-year	57.1	2.5	2.1	61.7	15.3	23.1	1.9	5.5	5.3	4.9	3.3	2.1	
2-year	7.9	13.9	7.2	29.0	25.3	45.8	5.4	16.8	7.0	8.2	5.3	3.0	
Less-than-2-year	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Received aid in 1989–90													
No	36.9	7.0	4.5	48.4	21.0	30.7	3.0	8.7	6.2	6.3	3.8	2.7	
Yes	55.1	3.2	2.2	60.4	13.8	25.8	2.7	7.5	5.2	4.9	3.7	1.9	
Received loan in 1989–90													
No	42.4	6.1	3.3	51.8	18.9	29.4	2.8	8.7	5.4	6.1	3.9	2.3	
Yes	57.7	1.9	3.5	63.1	12.6	24.4	2.8	5.8	6.6	3.9	3.1	2.1	
Received grant in 1989–90													
No	39.3	6.9	4.3	50.6	19.6	29.8	3.1	8.6	5.8	6.1	3.9	2.4	
Yes	55.1	2.6	1.9	59.6	14.4	26.0	2.4	7.3	5.6	5.0	3.5	2.2	
Employed while enrolled ⁶													
None	35.0	0.9	1.4	37.3	13.5	49.2	9.3	26.5	5.0	4.3	2.4	1.7	
1–50 percent	54.9	4.8	3.1	62.8	17.7	19.5	1.2	4.2	3.7	6.2	2.8	1.4	
More than 50 percent	42.9	5.8	3.5	52.1	17.4	30.4	2.8	8.6	6.9	5.2	4.1	2.8	
Enrollment status in 1989–90													
Exclusively full time	51.1	5.7	2.6	59.5	15.9	24.6	1.7	6.0	5.7	6.0	3.2	2.1	
Mixed	46.4	2.8	6.0	55.1	22.4	22.4	0.3	5.1	4.0	5.4	5.3	2.3	
Exclusively part time	4.1	7.8	6.5	18.3	21.6	60.1	14.0	24.0	5.6	3.9	6.2	6.5	
Enrollment status, first term													
Full time	51.7	4.1	2.5	58.3	16.7	25.0	1.7	6.6	5.3	5.6	3.5	2.3	
At least half, less than full time	14.5	11.5	6.1	32.1	24.5	43.4	5.9	18.9	5.9	2.5	7.8	2.5	
Less than half time	10.5	4.9	11.4	26.8	26.8	46.4	17.3	8.0	9.1	8.0	0.3	3.7	
Hours worked per week while enrolled													
None	49.8	4.4	2.0	56.2	17.8	26.0	2.3	8.4	3.8	5.8	3.2	2.5	
1–20 hours	51.3	5.2	2.5	59.0	16.4	24.5	0.7	5.7	5.7	6.8	4.4	1.3	
More than 20 hours	40.4	5.4	4.5	50.3	17.9	31.7	4.5	9.5	6.5	4.8	3.6	2.9	
Grade point average in 1989–90													
Below 2.75	37.4	5.2	3.5	46.2	20.0	33.8	3.3	7.9	7.3	7.5	5.8	2.0	
2.75 to 3.24	55.1	4.7	2.2	62.0	19.2	18.8	1.0	6.9	2.9	4.4	2.4	1.2	
3.25 or higher	63.5	4.3	2.3	70.1	12.3	17.6	1.5	4.5	2.3	4.2	1.6	3.5	

Table 12-1 Percentage distribution of 1989–90 beginning postsecondary students seeking bachelor's degrees, by persistence toward and completion of bachelor's and other degrees as of spring 1994 and selected characteristics—Continued

Selected characteristics	Completed a degree				Still enrolled for bachelor's ²	No degree, no longer enrolled toward a bachelor's							
	Highest degree completed ¹			Total any degree		Total no degree	Number of months enrolled ³						
	Bachelor's	Associate	Certificate				Less than 9	9–18	19–27	28–36	37–45	More than 45	
Months enrolled in 1989–90													
1–6 months	7.2	11.9	6.5	25.6	16.3	58.1	22.4	14.6	8.6	7.7	4.5	0.3	
7–9 months	50.2	4.2	3.2	57.6	15.4	27.0	1.2	9.6	5.8	5.5	3.2	1.7	
10–12 months	50.7	4.3	2.8	57.9	18.9	23.2	0.0	5.9	5.1	5.3	3.9	3.0	
Academic integration in 1989–90 ⁷													
Low	24.1	9.9	5.4	39.5	18.0	42.5	8.5	18.0	10.1	2.3	1.7	1.9	
Moderate	36.8	5.5	3.6	45.8	19.1	35.1	4.8	11.0	7.2	5.5	3.3	3.2	
High	52.0	4.5	3.0	59.5	16.5	24.0	1.3	6.0	4.7	5.9	4.2	2.0	
Social integration in 1989–90 ⁸													
Low	19.1	6.2	6.1	31.4	22.3	46.4	8.9	25.2	6.6	2.4	0.4	3.0	
Moderate	39.1	6.8	3.4	49.4	18.5	32.1	3.5	9.3	6.5	5.7	4.5	2.7	
High	56.9	3.1	2.7	62.7	15.5	21.8	1.0	4.6	4.8	6.1	3.5	1.9	
Self-rating of academic ability													
Above average	61.6	2.7	1.5	65.8	15.0	19.2	0.7	5.4	4.1	4.0	3.1	1.9	
Average or below	34.3	6.8	4.6	45.7	19.1	35.2	4.3	10.0	7.0	6.9	4.3	2.6	

— Not available.

¹ Includes only students who are no longer working toward a bachelor's degree, but who had completed another type of degree or award.

² Includes students who had completed another type of degree or award (associate degree, 11.8 percent; certificate; 2.7 percent), but are still working toward a bachelor's degree.

³ Enrollment can be full time or part time. Includes students who are still enrolled but are no longer working toward a bachelor's degree.

⁴ Limited to dependent students.

⁵ Students were considered to have a diploma only if they had a regular high school diploma. Students with a GED or other high school credentials were considered to have no diploma.

⁶ Percent of months enrolled in which a student was also employed in 1989–94.

⁷ Examines whether the student attended career-related lectures, participated in study groups with other students, talked about academic matters with faculty, or met with advisor concerning academic plans.

⁸ Examines whether the student had contact with faculty outside of class, went places with friends from school, or participated in student assistance centers/programs, or school clubs.

NOTE: Details may not add to totals due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1990 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:90/94).

Note to Indicator 12: Postsecondary persistence and degree completion

This analysis was constructed using data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS). BPS is based on a subsample of the 1990 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), which consists of students beginning their postsecondary education for the first time at community colleges, vocational schools, and institutions granting bachelor's degrees during the 1989–90 academic year. The BPS First Follow-up survey was conducted in the spring of 1992, 2 years after the student's entry into postsecondary education, and the Second Follow-up was conducted during the spring of 1994. BPS provides detailed information regarding the individual student's attendance patterns for 5 years following his or her first enrollment into postsecondary education. (For more information on BPS, see the *Sources of Data* section.)

This analysis examines persistence toward and completion of bachelor's and other types of degrees for students whose initial postsecondary degree objective when they first began postsecondary education in academic year 1989–90 was a bachelor's degree, without regard to the type of institution in which they first enrolled. Using the student's reported degree objective rather than the type of program offered by the particular institution permits comparison of rates of persistence and degree completion between students with the same degree objective but with different demographic, institutional, and attendance characteristics.

Initial degree objective

Whether the student was seeking a bachelor's degree was determined by his or her response to the question "Toward which degree or other award are the courses you are taking leading?" Students could

therefore be attending a 2-year institution but their degree objective was a bachelor's degree. Half of all beginning postsecondary students were working toward a bachelor's degree in 1989–90, and 25 percent of these students began at 2-year institutions that did not offer bachelor's degrees.

Persistence and degree completion

As this analysis was constructed, students were first divided into two broad categories: those who completed a bachelor's degree, and those who did not. Without regard to completion of other degrees, students who had not attained a bachelor's degree were then classified according to whether or not they were still enrolled toward a bachelor's degree. Students who were still enrolled toward a bachelor's degree were classified as such, while those who were no longer enrolled toward a bachelor's degree but had completed an associate degree or certificate were categorized according to their highest degree completed. The remaining students who had not completed a degree after 5 years (bachelor's degree, associate degree, or certificate), or who were still enrolled but not working toward a bachelor's degree, were categorized according to the number of months they were enrolled in postsecondary education. It is important to note that the number of months enrolled are not necessarily continuous months, so they cannot be used as an indicator of when the student left postsecondary education or stopped working toward a bachelor's degree. Rather, presenting the data in this manner is designed to give an indication of the time spent in postsecondary attendance, although no degree was completed.

Table S12 **Standard errors for the text table in *Indicator 12***

Selected characteristics	Completed a degree				Still enrolled for bach- elor's	No degree, no longer enrolled toward a bachelor's							
	Highest			Total any degree		Total no degree	Number of months enrolled						
	Bach- elor's	Asso- ciate	Certi- ficate				Less than 9	9-18	19-27	28-36	37-45	More than 45	
Total	1.4	0.9	0.5	1.3	1.0	1.2	0.5	0.8	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.4	
Level of first institution													
4-year	1.4	0.4	0.3	1.3	0.9	1.1	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.3	
2-year	2.0	3.4	2.0	3.7	3.1	3.5	1.7	3.1	2.2	2.3	1.8	1.3	
Age as of 12/31/89													
18 years or younger	1.5	0.9	0.6	1.5	1.1	1.3	0.4	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.5	0.5	
19 years	2.9	1.3	1.1	3.1	2.9	3.1	1.4	2.5	0.9	1.6	1.1	0.9	
20-29 years	3.6	3.9	3.4	4.9	4.5	5.8	3.0	3.9	2.3	1.3	4.0	0.6	
30 years or older	3.3	4.5	1.8	5.9	7.0	8.6	7.1	9.7	2.6	6.7	0.6	0.0	
Enrollment status, first term													
Full time	1.4	0.6	0.4	1.3	1.0	1.2	0.4	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.4	0.4	
At least half, less than full time	3.1	4.5	2.5	4.8	4.1	4.9	2.5	4.4	1.8	1.5	3.2	1.5	
Less than half time	4.7	3.1	6.6	7.9	7.8	8.9	5.8	3.9	6.7	5.5	0.3	3.7	
Received aid in 1989-1990													
No	2.0	1.6	0.9	2.1	1.6	1.8	0.8	1.3	1.1	1.0	0.8	0.6	
Yes	1.6	0.6	0.4	1.5	0.9	1.4	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.5	

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1990 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:90/94).